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The Politics of Media Conglomerates in Latin America:

A Contemporary Analysis

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INT 498: Senior Capstone

14 December 2017

ABSTRACT: With a particular focus on the Pink Tide (1998-2009) era, this paper looks at the effect that media markets have had on presidential elections in Latin America. By examining the media as a political apparatus through a historical, psychological, and economic lens, I come to the conclusion that right-wing actors have broadened their scope and influence by controlling large portions of Latin America’s media markets. Thus, I argue that higher degrees of media market concentration within a nation are an indication that a right-wing government is in power or is about to come into power. To test this theory, I utilize a statistical model in which three variables take into account the political, legal, and economic nature of each country’s respective media market during and after the Pink Tide.

**Introduction:**

Between the years of 1998 and 2009, various countries in Latin America experienced a drastic shift in political power. Within the course of a decade, various left-wing political parties almost simultaneously gained popularity in countries where right-wing regimes have historically retained power and influence. This came as a shock to the international community because for many decades the conservative right wing in Latin America was robust and politically unrivaled. Another interesting development during this time was the nature of the elections throughout Latin America. Many of these political parties had risen with the help of populist sentiments. Beginning with Hugo Chavez’s landslide election in 1999, the “left turn” ushered into power presidents from a diverse range of leftist parties (Luna and Kaltwasser 2014, 36). By the turn of the century, only a decade had passed since the end of the Cold War and the memories of military dictatorships were still very fresh in the minds of many Latin Americans. Thus, this drastic status quo change left many people with unanswered questions about the fate of their country leading into the 21st century.

To better illustrate the scope of this trend, 64% of Latin American presidents belonged to a right-wing party in the early 1990’s but by 2008 this number had fallen to 33% (See Table 1). By the beginning of 2009, fifteen out twenty-one Latin American countries had elected a president from a left or center-left party (Blanco and Grier 2011). This shift in Latin American politics is often referred to as *la* *Marea Rosada,* or the *“*Pink Tide.” Coined by New York Times columnist Larry Rohter in 2005, the term “Pink Tide” implied that the change had brought about a leftist ideology in the region. However, he was quick to put down the notion that the movement was communist. “They are not so much a red tide as a pink one. Doctrinaire socialism carries the day far less than pragmatism, an important change in tone and policy that makes this political moment decidedly new” (Rohter 2005).

Scholars generally agree that the left was able to garner so much political strength because of the economic incentive that many of these countries were faced with during this time.

Strong prices for commodities, particularly hydrocarbons and mining products, coupled with public support for post-neoliberal initiatives made it difficult for right-wing candidates to run on a conservative platform (Blanco and Grier 2012, 3). However, the preceding years illustrated an entirely different narrative. The collapse of communism and the gradual demise of revolutionary movements throughout Latin America allowed the right to celebrate a short-lived ideological victory (Luna and Kaltwasser 2014, 27). During the early 1990s, leftist movements of all types were on the defensive. Right wing parties during the time had been employing neoliberal economic policies as part of their compliance with the newly delegated international standards. Free market economic policies were supported by international organizations such as the IMF but even more so by the United States. As outlined in the Washington Consensus, these policy prescriptions included austerity measures, free trade agreements, deregulation, and privatization.

The debt crisis of the previous decade also had a major impact when the region’s per capita GDP fell from 112% to 98% of the world average, and from 34% to 26% of that of developed countries. Perhaps more important were the social costs of the debt crisis. The region’s poverty rate climbed sharply between 1980 and 1990 from 40.5% to 48.3% of the population (Ocampo 2013, 26). “The deterioration of income distribution in a number of countries exacerbated the sharp inequality that was (and sill is) a long-standing feature of Latin America” (Ocampo 2013, 26). Some scholars even suggest that during the mid-1990s, Latin America’s minority groups faced more political and economic discrimination than minority groups in any other region of the world (Ross 2010, 22). Therefore, presidential elections leading into the turn of the century became the ideal opportunity for disenfranchised ethnic groups to elect leaders who were running on the platforms of state-led economies and welfare reform. As a result, various Latin American countries including (notably): Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, Argentina, Brazil, and Venezuela elected populist governments that abandoned the Washington Consensus and adopted export led economic policies. Governments generated substantial profit in the short run and lifted many people out of poverty. This set off a domino effect in the region, which further permeated public support for the leftist political and economic agenda.

In her 2015 farewell address, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (former president of Argentina) could not hide her nostalgia when she commended Hugo Chávez of Venezuela, Lula da Silva of Brazil, and Evo Morales of Bolivia for changing the political direction of South America. She would go on to dub them the "the three musketeers" who were ultimately responsible for inspiring this movement across the continent. These populist left wing presidents ruled for quite some time until commodity prices dropped leading into the global recession. (See Table 1). Once again, widespread public dissent was felt throughout the region but this time people from all social classes were affected. While dealing with financial turmoil, left wing presidents found it difficult to overcome the unfavorable and biased news coverage of the conservative media outlets. Vulnerable regimes were pushed over the edge as the electorate once again rallied behind right wing representatives.

By 2015, many leftist Latin American presidents had succumbed to the wrath of their right-wing counterparts who once again rose to power in the following year’s elections (See Table 1). Though poor performing economies resulting from commodity price shock are to blame for widespread public dissent (as was the case in Brazil and Venezuela), the politics involved in reverting to right wing leadership cannot be ignored. After all, these countries were democratic and they each followed a certain electoral process. Each country experienced its own distinct transition from left to right leadership (or vice versa) whether that be through popular election or parliamentary impeachment as seen recently in Brazil (see Table 2). However, what most of these countries do have in common are news medias that to some degree are owned and influenced by right wing elites who control news content and use it as a mouthpiece against political opposition.

Mass media corporations in Latin America are owned in large parts by small groups of elites especially powerful families. The vast majority of Latin America’s broadcast television networks are subsidiaries of privately held rather than publicly-traded corporations, which are often owned entirely by a single wealthy family or individual. “These include Brazil’s TV Globo, RCN and Caracol in Colombia, 7 and Venevisión in Venezuela, all of which belong to family-owned conglomerates. Albavisión, property of Mexico’s Ángel González, owns major television networks in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Peru, Ecuador, Paraguay, Central America, and several Mexican states” (Boas 2012, 7). These privately held corporations ensure that only a single voice is heard in corporate governance and, presumably, editorial decisions. Ángel González has openly gone on record to admit that he had indeed used his media outlets to favor certain politicians. Furthermore, journalists and reporters from his corporation conform without hesitation. Media conglomerates not traded on public exchanges or marketplaces are subject to few if any disclosure requirements, reducing transparency and making even basic information about their operations difficult to obtain (Boas 2012, 7). With little to no regulatory agencies, it is no surprise how these corporations are able to get away with such corruption. These same practices would not pass in the United States. The owners of such firms also feel none of the market pressures that come from watching a share price plummet in response to media scandals. This allows for most of Latin America’s media moguls to act with impunity (Boas 2012, 7).

Politicians themselves are even sometimes directly involved. This holds true, for example, in Argentina’s *America TV* where its partners are Francisco de Narvaez, a former Congressman, and Jose Luis Manzano, who is also a former Congressman but now acts the Minister of the Interior. In Bolivia, former president Carlos Mesa Gisbert acted as the founder and owner of Red PAT until 2007, which included years of his presidential term (Boas 2012, 8). The process whereby fewer individuals and corporations control increasing shares of mass media is known as a concentration of media ownership (Baker 2007, 807). As Hughes and Prado assert, “Mass media in Latin American societies are controlled by small groups of elites that use the media’s definitional power to further, consciously or unconsciously, a set of class and family based interests and ideologies,” thus influencing “the political and policy making process” as well as “societal norms of cultural appropriateness” (Hughes and Prado 2001). In twelve out of the sixteen countries studied by Hughes and Prado, two television networks controlled over half of the national television market. In these cases, concentrated media ownership has translated into political influence for a handful of classist elites over which news stories get airtime and how they are reported (Luna and Kaltwasser 2014, 85). Though this is true among most Latin American countries, it does not explain why left-wing presidents were able to keep power in countries such as Ecuador, Uruguay, Nicaragua, Chile, and Bolivia. In these cases, even though the right-wing parties did not win their respective presidential elections, conservative forces still wielded powerful economic and political resources to shape and constrain national policy making agendas without noticeably affecting the outcome of the election (Luna and Kaltwasser 2014, 34).

In Latin America, the mass media is often referred to as the *cuarto poder*, or “fourth power,” to denote its crucial role in safeguarding and deepening democracy (Boas 2012, 1). Like the United States, Latin American mass media is naturally opinionated and politically biased. The difference is the relationship that many of these media outlets share with corresponding political actors and the scope of their influence. For the purpose of better understanding the effect that the media has had in Latin American politics within the past couple of decades, this study will first examine the historical relationship between these two sides. With the assumption that the private media sector was widely controlled by the right-wing elites during the Latin American Pink Tide, I will analyze whether or not a relationship exists between high levels of media concentration and whether or not right-wing presidents are in power during the Pink Tide years. Does the media in Latin America influence politics? If so, to what degree? Do changes in media ownership indicate political outcomes in Latin America?

H1: I argue that higher levels of media concentration will increase the probability that a right-wing president is in power. My study will start with a review of the literature that I have compiled over time for the purpose of touching, at least briefly, all the important points of my paper. Next, I will take the opportunity to explain the differences between the Latin American left wing and right wing, which are ideological concepts that I have already used earlier in my introduction. It will be important to illustrate this political distinction and how one is deeply rooted in history while the other is relatively new in the contemporary political landscape of Latin America. Using different sources, I will reaffirm the widely accepted argument that the Latin American right wing has had a grip on mass media and to some extent can influence policy agendas. At this point, I will transition to the part of my paper that is focused on the political psychology of Latin American telecommunications and media outlets. This is a key part of my paper that uses different sources to explain how the media promotes political participation among Latin Americans. After, I will conduct my data analysis in which I test three distinct variables for statistical significance. After, I will conclude with any findings that arise from my statistical model and either prove or disprove my hypothesis.

**Literature Review:**

A large part of my study holds that the Latin American media is predominantly influenced and to some degree controlled by the conservative right. These claims are being supported by Juan Pablo Luna and Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser who have looked at how these conservative parties have influenced the state’s electoral and governance processes. In their book, *The Resilience of the Latin American Right,* they examine the experiences of 9 different countries, 7 of which I include in my statistical model, and analyze the various tactics and mechanisms that are being utilized by the right wing in contemporary Latin America. What I hope to add to their study is a particular focus on how the media is used as a tool for political gain because their analysis only briefly touches this topic. Also, I want to see whether or not the Pink Tide had a positive or negative influence on media concentration as a reaction to leftist leadership. I also look at CIMA’s (Center for International Media Assistance) *Media in Latin America: A Path Forward* in which the authors talk about some of the difficulties that media diversity proponents face in Latin America. With left wing governments slowly leaving the picture, the future of leftist political parties looks bleak. Coppedge’s 1997 analysis of the various types of right-wing political parties that are found in Latin America will help readers understand their power derivatives from a historical context. This is important to explain because the vast majority of these conservative parties were not always present. Rather, they arose at different times and evolved from previous political systems and ideological influences. My analysis of these parties will assert that even though different right-wing parties differ along the ideological spectrum, they all share a common identity that places hierarchy over social grievances and that amending these grievances is not considered to be within governments best interest. In other words, right wing parties are strong proponents *laissez faire* economies regardless of circumstance. Furthermore, free markets will determine socioeconomic conditions. Another large part of my study will look at the political psychology of the mass media. In *A Theory of Media Politics,* John Zaller refers to news coverage as a political system in which individual politicians seek to gain office and conduct politics. Through telecommunications, such as broadcast television, rising politicians are able to tell their story and reveal who they are to the population. Once they gain airtime and recognition, they become legitimate political players and form loyal constituencies.

Ryan Salzman adds to my paper with his own studies that look at media content and the mobilizing effect that they have on people in Latin America. Some forms of media have greater reactionary influence than others depending on region and political scope. For example, while right wing elites own a large part of national media outlets, local radio stations and newspapers have had their own success in “political mobilization.” He claims that political mobilization is actively having a socializing effect on Latin Americans. More and more people can be seen participating in open governmental forums and in elections based off of studies that he conducted when looking at the different mediums of news coverage in Latin America. Ruben Ardila adds that political socialization influences the way in which people cope with the most important problems in their lives. Thus, for many Latin Americans, the mass media allows people to align themselves for or against a particular cause. Next, in order to understand why the media is so elitist and biased towards governments and political parties, I look at Fox and Waisbord’s historical analysis of how the media markets in Latin America came to be the way they are today. The markets were not always private. Thus, the privatization process illustrates a transfer of political power through media ownership.

**Latin American Political Parties**

Before going any further, the ideological concepts of the “left wing” and “right wing” must be defined and broken down to some degree because they differ throughout Latin America’s pluralistic political landscapes. Borrowing from Levitsky and Roberts’ definition, the contemporary Latin American left wing can be defined as “the political actors who seek to employ public authority to protect individuals and groups from market insecurities, reduce social and economic inequalities, and strengthen the voice of underprivileged groups in public affairs” (Murillo et al. 2008, 4). In other words, leftist parties seek greater equality, both socioeconomically and politically. This analysis of the Latin America left takes into account the overarching redistributive goals irrespective of the case-specific strategies pursued whether they be cash-transfer social welfare programs in the case of the social democratic left or land reform in the case of the populist left (Murillo et al. 2008, 5). The right wing, on the other hand is defined as a political position distinguished by the belief that the main inequalities between people are natural and outside the purview of the state (Mudde 2004). Michael Coppedge expands on this claim by differentiating the various right-wing parties. He claims that the vast majority of Latin American right-wing parties can be categorized into four different types. The first type is those who have their roots grounded in the oligarchic parties of the nineteenth century. These are the parties that did not moderate their political platforms while appealing to the masses from the lower class after the expansion of suffrage, which resulted in a loss of public support when Third Wave Democratization (1974-1990) took place (e.g., Chilean Conservative Party). The second type are those that are characterized by the adherence to a blatantly fascist ideology (e.g., Chilean Nazi Party). Though some of these parties still exist, the majority of them have devolved into the third categorization which are those who support a current or former authoritarian regime and have origins in an authoritarian past (e.g., the National Renovating Alliance in Brazil). Finally, the most prominent type are the center-right parties that seek to win over middle- and lower-class support through the platforms of private-public strategic cooperation, public security, morality, and the prioritization of economic growth (Coppedge, 1997). From this description, it is clear that the Latin American Right has developed and evolved over time. What hasn’t changed so much are the core principles and tenets that emphasize conservatism and a hierarchal power structure supported by cross-cutting cleavages. “A long-standing intellectual tradition defines the right as a conservative ideology that is in favor of the status quo and is defended by the traditional sectors of the economy” (Luna and Kaltwasser 2014, 5). Thus, when right wing political forces gain control of large parts of the media market, they do so with the intention of suppressing smaller, more liberal media outlets. From an economic point of view, oligopolistic markets assume that competitive pressure will be easily downplayed thus allowing its owners to play politics without having to worry about losing viewers, readers, or listeners. Since diverse representation in media ownership and content can increase openness to social change, this apparatus becomes a very effective political mouthpiece that politicians use to leverage votes and public support in order to disproportionately shape public opinion in favor of majoritarian political views (Blofield 2011).

**Political Psychology of the Media:**

As briefly mentioned in my introduction, the influence that the media has on Latin Americans is quite interesting. When looking at the way media is consumed in modern day Latin America, it is no surprise that there are various different outlets being used depending on country and region. Broadcast media, primarily television, remains to be the most politically influential medium in the region. It is present in most Latin American households and is the primary source of news and information by a wide margin (Boas 2012, 11). Radio news has a large scope as well but has an even greater influential effect on political interest. In fact, a study by Ryan Salzman concluded that listening to radio news, reading newspapers and using the Internet to gather news each decrease the probability of having no interest in politics in Latin America (Salzman 2012, 73). In another one of his studies, he looks at media consumption among four different mediums: *Newspaper, TV News*, and *Radio News* and finds that they statistically increase the likelihood of “political mobilization” meaning turning out to vote in presidential elections or attending open forum governmental meetings. *Radio News,* however, had the greatest effect because radio stations are more locally oriented than television stations which operate on a national level. Radio consumers also tend to be poorer and live in more rural areas. During the 90’s and the early part of the 21st century, television was still the most popular and influential form of news media available. In summary, scholars agree that media outlets, particularly broadcast television and radio, do have a mobilizing effect on the Latin America polity.

**Broadcast Media Market:**

During the period of Third Wave Democratization, the media market in Latin America slowly started to privatize once democratic governments began to auction off their state-owned television stations (Fox and Waisbord 306). During the 1990s the participation of state and public interests in the media shrank. A *laissez-faire* approach, however, came at an unforeseen cost. “Media privatization became commonplace, but the removal of cross-media ownership restrictions allowed for a process of rapid concentration of information resources and consolidation of media corporations” (Fox and Waisbord 307). As a result, family-owned media corporations throughout Latin America that had already been privatized began to buy out the market as fast as the government was willing to let go of them. In Brazil, for example, commercial broadcasting licenses were routinely awarded free of charge to politicians and their families until competitive auctions began in 1995. “As a result, at least 271 Brazilian politicians are partners or directors of state or local broadcast media. Among them were Fernando Collor, a senator and former president of Brazil, and Roseana Sarney, a governor, former senator, and daughter of senator and former president José Sarney,” all of whom had belonged to right or right-of-center political parties (Boas 2012, 8). The Collor and Sarney family conglomerates now own radio stations, major newspapers, and the local affiliate networks of TV Globo in the Brazilian states of Alagoas and Maranhão, respectively. In 2009, Brazilian authorities recorded a conversation between José Sarney and his son in which they discussed using their television network and newspaper to attack one of Governor Roseana’s political opponents (Boas 2012, 8). This trend continued well into the 90’s as regional media powerhouses took the lead in the development of satellite television throughout the region, which increased the scope, and influence of these conglomerates. Soon western media groups abroad started to provide satellite connections, large-scale international operations, and television archives while Latin American partners provided the domestic experience of local programming in Spanish and Portuguese (Fox and Waisbord 307). Then, the formation of conglomerates accelerated the transition of media ownership from family to corporations. The removal of protectionist policies, higher barriers to entry in media markets, and the need for large amounts of capital to finance conglomerates made the long-term survival of family ownership impossible. (Fox and Waisbord 307). By the 21st century, large monopolies had formed and established themselves as dominant broadcast media companies both within the country and transnationally. As a result, states and governments are unable to overtly restrict media content without coming off as authoritarian.

Though not a Pink Tide country itself, Colombia’s government and its strong ties to business conglomerates make for a classic example of crony capitalism in the media market.

Business conglomerates–both national and international–mostly control the media. During President Uribe’s government (2002-2010), the relationship between both sectors was vital to his public support and long-standing approval. Uribe established close ties with business executives across various economic sectors in order to ensure favorable measures for acquiring material and financial goods. In return, he granted benefits such as lower tax rates through laws that favored these corporate elites. The media supported Uribe’s administration through a favorable presentation of the news (Luna and Kaltwasser 2014, 205). Opposition found few opportunities in either the written or oral press to voice complaints and hold the government accountable for its actions, which helped Uribe maintain high approval rating during his two-term presidency (Luna and Kaltwasser 2014, 205). Media conglomerates were also major campaign sponsors for Uribe’s two presidential campaigns. Although other candidates also received donations form business entities, Uribe’s campaign received the largest share of money. In exchange for these donations, Uribe favored these conglomerates in various ways. “He aided entrepreneurs in the massive purchase of land at low prices in the Caribbean coast, for example, and he granted them a significant number of contracts with the state in different sectors including: finance, infrastructure services, and the food industry just to name a few” (Luna and Kaltwasser 2014, 205).

When it comes to political elections, it is very clear that the media picks favorites. Their favoritism, however, is backed by the financial incentives that right wing parties are able to exploit at the expense of the political process. Opposing political parties will often receive less airtime than the incumbent candidate. Incumbent parties are also typically much more present in the media because they can use public resources to buy political advertising. Some countries even have election laws that try to even out the playing field, but bigger political parties are often very closely connected with media corporations and their owners. Thus, behind the scenes politicking results in biased news coverage during campaigns that ultimately help the incumbent, usually belonging to a right-wing party (Carreras and Irepoğlu 2013).

**Data and Methods:**

Once again, I argue that higher levels of media concentration will increase the probability that a right-wing president is in power given the level of favoritism experienced on behalf of the media. To further reiterate, this research does not suggest that the media directly causes certain parties to lose or win certain elections more than others. Rather, the independent variables in this study will be tested as indicators for the status quo political landscape throughout Latin America. To conduct this study, I will use data from Freedom House, which—in their own words—is an independent organization that is dedicated to the expansion of freedom and democracy around the world. A large part of their work is centered on analyzing the progress and decline of freedom using different indicators.

For the purpose of this study I will be utilizing Press Freedom reports which score each country and territory from 0 (best) to 100 (worst) on the basis of 23 questions divided into three “environmental” subcategories: *legal, political*, and *economic*. The combined score determines the status designation of Free, Partly Free, or Not Free. The *legal environment* (0-30) variable is scored by looking at the laws and regulations that influence media content, and the extent to which there are used in practice to enable or restrict the media’s ability to operate. Freedom House looks at: “the positive impact of legal and constitutional guarantees for freedom of expression; the negative aspects of security legislation, the penal code, and other punitive statutes; penalties for libel and defamation; the existence of and ability to use freedom of information legislation; the independence of the judiciary and official regulatory bodies; registration requirements for both media outlets and journalists; and the ability of journalists’ organizations to operate freely (Freedom House).” The *political environment* (0-40) variable scores the degree of political bias in the content of news media. “Issues examined include the editorial independence of both state-owned and privately owned outlets; access to information and sources; official censorship and self-censorship; the vibrancy of the media and the diversity of news available within each country or territory; the ability of both foreign and local reporters to cover the news in person without obstacles or harassment; and reprisals against journalists or bloggers by the state or other actors, including arbitrary detention, violent assaults, and other forms of intimidation (Freedom House).” The *economic environment* (scored 0-30)measures to what extent the media is owned or controlled by public or private entities thus affecting the diversity of views. “This includes: the structure of media ownership; transparency and concentration of ownership; the costs of establishing media as well as any impediments to news production and distribution; the selective withholding of advertising or subsidies by the state or other actors; the impact of corruption and bribery on content; and the extent to which the economic situation in a country or territory affects the development and sustainability of the media (Freedom House).” To test my hypothesis, I am going to utilize the *economic environment* as my independent variable and whether or not the president belongs to a right wing party as my dependent variable, which is coded as 0 (for a left wing president) or 1 (for right wing president). I will also run regression for the other two variables in order to see if one of them is more or less statistically significant than the *economic environment* variable.

Since this these three scores have only been available since 2001, my statistical analysis will only take into account the Latin American countries that have experienced leftist leadership from that year to the present day: Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay. I exclude Brazil, Venezuela and Cuba in my case selection because of extraordinary political circumstances that I suspect would distort my findings. Thus, my regression analysis will have three scores to determine whether or not relationships exist between right wing governments and factors that influence press freedom.

**Statistical Model:**

Stata Logit Regression: *environmental variable(s) of media* x *right wing government in power*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Independent Variables: | Logit Regression Coefficient: | P-Value: | Standard Error: | z-score: |
| Political Environment | -.114383 | 0.095 | .0685323 | -1.67 |
| Legal Environment | .0545294 | 0.153 | .0381172 | -1.43 |
| Economic Environment | .1442636 | 0.019 | .5879979 | 2.35 |

Significance if p-value<0.05 | Number of Observations: 195

**Results and Findings:**

The results of my regression analysis turned out to be statistically insignificant for two out of the three variables that I tested. Given that the p-values for both the *political* and *legal* environment of the media were low, it disqualifies the statistical significance of their respective regression coefficients. The *economic* environment, on the other hand yielded results in favor of my hypothesis. With a p-value less than 0.05, I can conclude with certainty that a statistically significant relationship exists between my dependent and independent variables.

My results show that with every one-unit increase in country’s *economic* environment, the probability of the government being run by a right-wing party increases by 14%. In essence, what this coefficient is saying is that when the concentration of a media market increases, it is indicative of a right-wing government in power because of crony capitalistic practices that allow these non-state actors to influence a greater number of voters. Having done additional research, I have also come to the conclusion that while the *economic* environment variable measures media concentration, it is unable to separate party allegiance out of the equation. In other words, this research model was designed under the assumption that media concentration is a phenomenon permeated by the right wing. Though this is largely true considering my case selection, if left wing parties start to increase their own share of the market then the *economic* environment variable will include it within the score as a positive unit. Thus, though the results of my regression analysis seem to largely favor my hypothesis, it is important to understand this discrepancy. The thirteen cases employed in this study are those that have media markets that are largely owned and operated by right wing elites. Had Freedom House allowed me to control for public/private party shares in each country respectively, my regression analysis would yield more accurate results as to the true marginal effects of this phenomenon. Nonetheless, with a low p-value, the results are at least partially accurate. These results shift my attention to left wing governments in order to understand what happens when the rightist forces fail to correctly predict the correct regime in power.

In Central America, the media industry started out as a system of capital and knowledge. Thus, it was only available to those well off who were already benefiting from society. As it developed, enterprises were started in an effort to promote political goals by those who could afford it. Over time, its survival was dependent on the government and the nation’s elite for assistance and advertising support. Media oligarchies quickly formed and have since been predominantly owned by rich families (Salzman 2009). In Panama, a prominent media oligarchy is often referred to as the “twenty families.” While also biased in media content, these families are ideologically different and have engaged in political and economic disagreement both with the government and with each other for a prolonged period of time. Because of this divide among elites, media outlets in Panama appear as though they provide multiple viewpoints and pursue active discussion, but in reality, they are just in perpetual competition with each other (Salzman 2009). Costa Rica, in contrast, has seen a variety of successful and non-partisan media enterprises throughout modern history. As a result, it even boasts a higher Press Freedom index score than any other country in Latin America. Perhaps the media in some countries is not as politicized as others.

In the case of Ecuador, Rafael Correa has been the acting president since 2007 after running on a left-wing platform during the Pink Tide. He has retained a very high approval rating throughout his presidency but was subject to criticism for how he handled the media. After years of unfavorable news coverage, Correa went after the media by fining journalists and newspapers for inappropriate reporting. By suppressing the media creating several public news outlets (*Ecuador TV (ECTV)*, *Public Radio of Ecuador (PRE),* and *El Telegrapho* newspaper), Correa was able to directly change the concentration of media in Latin America from a leftist vantage point. Thus, media ownership is not exclusive to the right wing during Pink Tide years though they do account for the largest shares of the total market.

This introduces a new concept in which populist leaders also enjoy the option to suppress media markets and mold them in way that benefits their policy agenda. Cas Mudde defined populism as “a thin centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ and ‘the corrupt elite,’ and which argues that politics should be the expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people” (Mudde 2004). Populist presidents end up having the liberty to change the make up of the media market so long as they have high approval rating from their constituents. Populism after all is not exclusive to the left or right. Rather, it manifests itself in guise of different political parties throughout history. For Latin America, this was true with the right in the 90’s and with the left during the Pink Tide with leaders such as Hugo Chavez, Evo Morales and Lula Da Silva.

**Conclusion:**

After having run regression, I can conclude that the effects of two out of the three independent variables on the dependent variable are statistically insignificant. Though each variable carries a score of 0-30 (*legal* and *economic)* or 0-40 (*political)*, Freedom House seems to score many of these countries similarly given regional Latin America’s homogeneity. There was not enough spread among the scores to generate regression coefficients that would either undermine or challenge my argument. Thus, my hypothesis is correct. With that being said, the purpose of this study was to uncover various methods and mechanisms that mass media corporations use to push favorable political agendas. Beginning with my analysis on how the media market came to be the way it is today; the degree of public-private disproportionality is not surprising. Since the majority of media markets in Latin America are now owned and controlled by the right wing, corporations have made it increasingly difficult for opposing political rivals to enter the political scene without being economically excluded from a fair race. As previously mentioned, funding and access to airtime has become a problem for these parties because incumbents tend to be supported by the acting government in cases where an election can change the status quo. Different news mediums in Latin America also determine the type of political mobilization that people engage in. While television is the most used medium of news consumption, radio consumption leads to a greater increase in voter turnout and local political participation.

Alternately, an obvious news medium that my research does not take into account is the use of the Internet for its up to date news platforms and social media networks. While traditional news media (television, radio, newspapers) appear to mobilize Latin Americans to vote, Internet news is negatively correlated with voting. A study on the political mobilization effect of the Internet finds that Latin Americans who gather information online report voting less than those who do not use the Internet for such purposes (Salzman 2015, 87). This finding, which reveals an apparent malaise effect, is notable but not surprising. According to prior research, Internet news consumers are separable from traditional news media users. What could explain this phenomenon? Scholars suggest that it could stem from the fact that the Latin American Internet news consumer demographic may be disproportionately young, which is significant given that younger individuals vote less than older individuals. Research on news media consumption correlates have revealed that Latin Americans who have less trust in the media consume more Internet news. If these individuals’ skepticism extends to the political and social systems, it would be reasonable to expect a large proportion of Internet news consumers to not participate in an institutionalized form of political behavior like voting but instead engage in less institutionalized political behaviors. Their lack of trust in the system is heightened via Internet use, which demobilizes voting participation (Salzman 2015, 87). Therefore, Internet use would not have been a good subject worth studying.

Perhaps my most significant finding is the role that Populist presidents play under right wing or left-wing denominations. I find that leftist presidents have the potential to be just as likely to engage media censorship as rightist presidents which means that executive policies to suppress media outlets can be just as damaging as corporate favoritism in new coverage. Nonetheless, with the exception of Venezuela, media markets across Latin America will be widely controlled by the upper-class elites of the land for the foreseeable future. From the start, this power and influence has been vested within the right wings of Latin American countries. These elites, after all, are the same capitalists who bought and later expanded their corporations leading into the 21st century when broadcast and telecommunication were quickly developing. With an absent legal framework that would otherwise be used to combat media fallacy, the government and its people are at the mercy of the news and coverage that the media decides to perpetuate. The effect of this phenomenon can be seen throughout the Pink Tide years as a handful conglomerates continued to expand and conquer despite ideological contrast with their corresponding governments. The toothless nature of these expanding right-wing media outlets allow for a predictive capacity in relation to governing ideology. However, regardless of the acting regime, right wing prominence though communications have proven to be politically robust.

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Appendix:

Table 1:

1999 2012 2016

[](https://ramenir.files.wordpress.com/2016/05/pink-tide-latin-america.png)

Table 2:

